

Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

June 6, 2021

Today's solemnity was first called *Corpus Christi*, which is Latin for "the Body of Christ." European Catholics in the Middle Ages wanted a joyful day to celebrate Jesus' gift of the Eucharist. During this period in history, many faithful Catholics went to Mass but did not receive Holy Communion, and many misunderstandings were developing over the Church's doctrine about the Eucharist. The feast of Corpus Christi, extended to the universal Church by Pope Urban IV in the early 1200's, continues to be celebrated in order to help instill in the faithful a strong faith in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist. St. Thomas Aquinas authored the prayers for this feast, including songs we still sing during Eucharistic Adoration. The feast is at a good time of the year for processions and street fairs and other outdoor events.

In many towns the streets were lined with flowers. Often flowers and herbs were arranged into pictures and intricate designs. The Blessed Sacrament was carried outdoors in a Monstrance under a canopy. Bands played and many people joined in singing hymns of praise. These processions still take place in some towns in Latin America and in Europe.

Processions are still encouraged, as is Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. This solemnity is celebrated on the Sunday after Holy Trinity Sunday.



What is Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament?

Benediction is a solemn way to worship the Presence of Christ in the Eucharist outside of Mass. The Blessed Sacrament is put in a ciborium or monstrance* and placed on an altar lighted with candles, after which the Blessed Sacrament is incensed by the priest. The ritual includes time of silent prayer, hymns and readings from Scripture. The ritual for Benediction is normally led by a priest.

** A monstrance is a sacred vessel used to display the Blessed Sacrament. It has a clear glass center to hold the consecrated host, a stem by which it can be carried and a base to keep it stable when placed on the altar. It can include very ornate carvings or decorations.*

Pope Francis Speaks About the Eucharist

“Christ’s presence among us is not only a consolation, but also a promise and a summons. It is a promise that everlasting joy and peace will one day be ours in the fullness of his Kingdom. But it is also a summons to go forth, as missionaries, to bring the message of the Father’s tenderness, forgiveness and mercy to every man, woman and child.”

(from Pope Francis’ remarks from the Eucharistic Congress in the Philippines in February, 2016 as reported on the Catholic News Agency website: catholicnewsagency.com)

WHAT WE BELIEVE ABOUT THE EUCHARIST

- The Eucharist is a **Sacrament**, which means God uses physical signs to **give us His grace**. Sacraments have an effect on our souls because of the **Holy Spirit at work in them**—the grace of the Eucharist is true **communion** with our Lord Jesus Christ and with His Body, the Church.
- The Eucharist is a **sacrificial offering** that celebrates Jesus Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. He celebrated the Last Supper with His apostles to help them (and us) understand His death’s sacrificial meaning. He commanded His apostles to **continue the memorial** of His death until He comes again—as a way for all people, in every time and place, to join their lives and hearts to His sacrifice.
- The Eucharist is a **memorial** of Jesus’ death and resurrection. In the memorial of the Mass, we are brought to the **eternal moment** of Jesus’ sacrifice and united with all who receive the grace of forgiveness and new life through that sacrifice.
- The Eucharist offers the **Real Presence** of Jesus Christ. We offer to God the holy and living presence of His Son—given to us through the power of the Holy Spirit. We receive Jesus’ **holy, living and glorified** Presence in the Eucharist. The substance (or nature) of the bread and wine is transformed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. The Eucharist still has the appearance of bread and wine, but it has become our spiritual food and drink—Jesus Christ nourishes us and strengthens us with Himself as the Bread of Life.
- In Eucharist, we **give thanks** to the Father through His Son Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Eucharist lets us share in the **heavenly banquet**—the wedding feast of the Lamb—and we anticipate the glory and joy of eternal life in heaven. Heaven and earth are joined in one sacrifice of praise.

Prayer on the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ

Lord Jesus Christ,

We worship you living among us in the Sacrament of your body and blood.

May we offer to our Father in heaven a solemn pledge of undivided love.

May we offer to our brothers and sisters a life poured out in loving service of that kingdom where you live with the Father and the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. *Amen.*



Want to read more? Read John 6:28-71; Matthew 26:26-29; 1 Corinthians 10:15-17; 11:23-29